

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 85.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, AUGUST 16, 1890. PRICE TWOPENCE.

A RED SISTER.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FROM this point Fate had things all her own way, and events followed thick and fast. Lady Joan condescended to the subterfuge from which at first she had so indignantly recoiled, and laid a trap for Lady Honor which, for low cunning, could not have been surpassed by an Old Bailey criminal.

Blind as any mole, Lady Honor walked into the trap. On the day after Gallagher's visit she had occasion to go into the library to fetch an envelope from a stationery cabinet, and lo, beside it on the writing-table was a letter addressed to Herrick, in Lady Joan's writing.

"Oh, my good luck!" cried the girl, hastily seizing a pencil and copying the address.

And, before the day was over, with her own hand she had posted to that address the bulky packet over which she had spent her midnight hours.

She congratulated herself not a little on her own prudence and sagacity in thus waiting for chance to favour her, instead of giving way to impatience, and despatching her letter to Herrick's former address in New York, where, for aught she knew to the contrary, it might have lain for weeks unclaimed.

Those self-congratulations would have suffered considerable modification if she could have known that, in little over a fortnight, her recklessly-worded letter

would find its way back to England, and straight into the hands of the man whom she had therein described under a variety of contemptuous epithets—"the serpent" being about the mildest of them.

Before the week ended, in the hope of still farther expediting matters, she despatched a telegram after her letter. She rode over to Wrexford to send it, preferring not to set the tongues of the village gossips going over affairs at the Castle.

Her message was a brief one, "Come back at once," was all she said in it, hoping that Herrick would read between the lines, and gather the urgency of the occasion from the mere fact of her sending a message at all.

The next event of importance reached Lady Honor's ears in roundabout fashion, through a letter from her father, and was nothing less than the purchase—all but completed—of Southmoor by Lady Joan.

The Earl stated the fact in the baldest manner possible, in about twenty words, saying nothing of the battle royal which had been fought between Lady Joan and Mr. McGowan over the matter.

Mr. McGowan had contested every inch of the ground, with a persistence worthy of the trust which the Gaskell family had reposed in him through so many years. In the first instance he had protested against the consent of Lord Southmoor's co-trustee, Mr. Rothsay, being so much as applied for until Herrick had been consulted as to the propriety of withdrawing the required thousands from their present investments. His protest fell flat, Lady Joan having taken time by the forelock, and successfully impressed old Mr. Rothsay with her views before she had made them known to the lawyer.

Mr. McGowan's next step was to write an urgent letter to Herrick, stating facts to

him in strong language. He applied to Lady Joan for an address to which to send his letter. Her reply to his application was to the effect, that, beyond the fact that her son was in California, she knew nothing whatever of his movements.

Then the lawyer, in his fidelity to the Gaskell interests, did a very foolish thing—refused to have anything to do with a transaction which his judgement utterly condemned. Upon this Lady Joan at once commissioned Lord Southmoor's legal advisers to act as her representatives in the purchase of the property, and the whole thing was hurried through in a manner that showed that the interests of the seller, rather than those of the buyer, had been consulted throughout.

Of all this, however, Lord Southmoor said nothing in his letter to his daughter.

"Your aunt," he wrote, "has begged, as a special favour, to be allowed to purchase the home of her childhood, and the purchase is now all-but complete. It cost me not a little to yield to her wish; but I could not find it in my heart to refuse her permission to do what has undoubtedly given her great pleasure." This was said by way of salve to his own personal dignity. "It will, however, be impossible for me to take up the position of tenant where once I was sole master and owner, so I shall continue as heretofore my life of pilgrim and sojourner. However, I hope that you, my child, unburdened by your father's sensitiveness, will live out your young life on the old acres, and will offer no opposition to your aunt's plan for your future, a plan that will, I firmly believe, conduce as much to Herrick's happiness as to yours."

Lady Honor's quick eye pierced what she was pleased to call "the wretched humbug of the whole thing" in a moment. She took a pen and dashed off there and then a brief, characteristic letter.

"DEAR FATHER," she wrote, "I'm sorry Aunt Jo has wasted her money over Southmoor. It's a wretched old place, and only fit for bats and owls to live in. I don't wonder you prefer the 'dolce far niente' of continental life to the dreary responsibilities of a tumble-down estate. I don't want Aunt Jo to bother about my future—I've already arranged it for myself. Neither my young nor my middle-aged life will be lived out on the old acres, but I hope and trust in a sweet little shop—on the Montagne de la Cour, in Brussels—devoted to the sale of 'lead pencils and artists' colours,' and with the name of

Van Zandt written in big letters over the door-way. Give my love to my mother.

"Always your affectionate daughter,
"HONOR."

Angry and indignant at this persistent ignoring of the matrimonial arrangements which she had made for herself, and with the spirit of defiance strong upon her, she resolved that she would read her letter aloud to "Aunt Jo" before she consigned it to the letter-box.

So, letter in hand, she dashed into Lady Joan's boudoir.

"I've heard from father; shall I read to you my reply?" she asked, in her usual loud, brusque tones, as she entered.

Lady Joan was seated at her writing-table, her pen in one hand, the other supporting her head as it bent over her quarto sheet. Her pen must have been a busy one, for sheets of barely dried manuscript, torn in half, filled her waste-paper basket. In spite of its hard work, however, the essay on "Standards of Morality" had not advanced by a single line, for there, heading a blank page, stood the question with which it had started, "What is the Criterion of a Moral Act?" unanswered still.

As her niece entered, she withdrew the hand which supported her head, and turned so white and forlorn a face towards the girl that her defiant, angry mood at once gave place to one of pity for one who, whatever her sins might be, was evidently suffering some acute mental distress.

Lady Honor flung her letter on the floor, and knelt down beside her aunt, taking one of her hands in hers.

"Oh, Aunt Jo, what is it?" she cried. "Tell me, tell me! Let me help you if I can."

Lady Joan released her hand from Honor's clasp.

"Who said that I wanted help?" she asked, coldly, proudly. "I do not understand you."

Lady Honor was not to be so easily rebuffed.

"No one has said it, but any one who has eyes can see it," she answered, boldly.

Lady Joan looked disturbed.

"See what?" she asked, uneasily. "See that I look ill, old, weary? Can you wonder at it after—after—" She broke off abruptly, not daring to speak words in which her conscience read a double meaning.

Lady Honor upturned her face, and

fixed her clear, bright eyes full on her aunt's drooping lids.

"Aunt Joan," she cried, impetuously, not weighing her words, but, according to her wont, speaking right out the thoughts of her heart, "it's that man—that wretched creature who keeps coming to the house, who makes you look so ill and worried. He's wickedness incarnate, and he's killing you by inches, one way or another, I'm confident. Have nothing more to do with him; let me see him for you. There isn't a man or woman living who ever frightened me!"

Lady Joan looked at Honor with cold, astonished eyes.

"Frightened!" she repeated. "Who said—who dared say that I was afraid of this man? Honor, I do not understand your meaning. You may, however, rest assured that when I need your help in the management of my affairs, I will ask for it."

She looked at the letter which Honor had flung upon the ground.

"For your father, did you say? No, I do not wish to read it. You had better put it at once into the letter-box; the post will leave in a few minutes."

She took up her pen, and bent over her manuscript once more.

Lady Honor felt herself dismissed.

"What is it? What is it?" she said to herself, as she dropped her letter into the Castle letter-box. "I feel like one groping in the dark for something that lies close at hand."

She felt that some terrible trouble was overhanging the house. Her thoughts flew back to the conversation she had overheard in the pine-wood. Gallagher had hinted at some secret in Lady Joan's life, of which he intended to get possession. What if such a secret did exist, and the man had found means of fulfilling his intention!

The supposition seemed to solve in one breath the mystery of the man's frequent visits to the house, and Lady Joan's harassed, haggard appearance.

For a moment Honor forgot Herrick and Lois and their wrongs in her indignation against the contemptible creature who was most probably trading on a woman's fears. A great feeling of pity swept over her for the one who, sinner though she might be, was evidently already paying a heavy price for whatever of sin she had done.

"Can I do nothing for her—absolutely nothing?" she cried, passionately.

Echo might have answered her question with the repetition of her last word, since to no human being has ever been accorded the privilege of turning back and re-writing the pages of the past.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE following letters were received about this time by M. Van Zandt from Lady Honor Herrick.

"Longridge Castle, Friday Morning.
(Don't ask me for a date.)"

"MY HENRI,—Never again send me such a farrago of nonsense as I had the honour of receiving yesterday, or I shall regret ever having taught you English, and so given you the means of expressing yourself in my mother-tongue. I can only repeat I am ugly, I am poor, and I've no more chance of making a brilliant marriage, as you call it, than I have of riding on a broomstick to the moon. If Herrick and I were the only man and woman in the world, we should each die respectively bachelor and spinster. So if you wash your hands of me, I shall just shape my course for myself, and on the very day that I am twenty-one rush over to Brussels and set up the little shop on the Montagne de la Cour entirely on my own account. And come near it if you dare!

"But I can't stop to scold you as you ought to be scolded; I am all eagerness to ask if you have anything to tell me about the Red Sisters in general, or Sister Héloïse in particular. Time is precious. I feel Herrick can't begin too soon to use any influence he may have among Catholic ecclesiastics to get Lois out of her prison—I can think of a convent in no other light. I am so thankful that I chanced upon his address as I did, although at the same time it does seem strange that Aunt Jo should leave her letter lying about in this careless way, when she is so cautious in not allowing a soul to get a glimpse of his letters to her. The last letter that came, I suppose, touched upon business matters, for she took notes from it, which she sent to Mr. Champneys, the manager of the Wrexford mines. He in return, sent a messenger to ask for Herrick's address, in order to send a reply to him. I was in the room when the message was brought in, and listened eagerly for Aunt Jo's reply.

"It was short and sweet, like a donkey's gallop. She grew crimson as she gave it.

'Tell Mr. Champneys,' she said, 'that Mr. Gaskell was on the wing when he wrote to me, and his last address is useless. If, however, Mr. Champneys will send to me the letter he wishes forwarded, I will enclose it in one of mine so soon as I hear again from Mr. Gaskell.'

"Then she coloured again, and turned her back on me sharply as if she felt my eyes fixed on her. Sometimes I fancy she is doing all sorts of things she is ashamed of—things she would have scorned to do a short time back. She looks so terribly ill, that I can't help pitying her in spite of all her wicked plotting against poor little Lois. You can have no idea how tall, and thin, and stately she looks in her long, flowing, black gowns with her white hair mounted high beneath her widow's cap—the very spectre of the handsome, imperious mistress of the Castle, whose portrait hangs beside Uncle John's in the hall. I am more than ever confident that she has something on her mind—something over and above the horribly mean tricks which she has been playing off on Herrick—something, too, that little by little seems to be sending her into her grave. I have been trying in all sorts of ways to get her confidence. But no! I might as well try to make the Castle walls speak to me as Aunt Jo when she has a mind to be silent. Sometimes we sit together for hours without opening our lips. She has quite given up talking about taking a house in town, and 'presenting me'; she has even, I fancy, given up all hope of making a match between Herrick and me, for she never mentions his name to me now. She seems to me like a person who requires all her strength to bear some secret sorrow or malady, and so has none to spend upon other people and their affairs.

"Every one is noticing how ill she is looking. She eats next to nothing, and looks as if she never slept. Her maid asked me the other day if I did not think she ought to see a doctor, she has fainted once or twice lately the girl said. I went to Aunt Jo at once, and said right out that I thought she ought to have Dr. Scott in. She was busy reading a lot of papers—I think connected with the purchase of Southmoor—and I had to speak two or three times before I could get her attention. At last she looked up with a strange expression on her face, and instead of answering my question, said in an odd, strained voice, 'Honor, whatever else is said of me in the

days to come, this at least shall be said—that I saved the home of my fathers from the auctioneer's hammer.'

"It is all strange and bewildering together. I am longing for Herrick to return. But even supposing that he should start immediately after he receives my letter, he can't get back much under three weeks or a month from now. Sometimes I tremble to think what may happen here before that month has run out, with Aunt Jo in her present state, and that man Gallagher always about the house. I've a great mind to lie in wait for him some day, and pounce upon him, and ask him what he means by worrying Aunt Jo in this way. I should thoroughly enjoy making that man shake in his shoes. If only Herrick had used his common-sense, and—but there, I can't trust myself to write about his fatuous folly, so I will say good-bye, and ask you to believe that I am,

"In spite of all creation, and the claims of my relations,

"Your own,

"HONOR.

"Postscript.—When you next write, kindly make a marked distinction between the use of letter 'v,' and letter 'w,' or people will think I taught you English from the scenes between Sam Weller and his father, in the 'Pickwick Papers.' It is all very well for you to say, in your broken English, 'On my word of honour;' it doesn't look pretty when written."

"Longridge Castle, Wednesday.

"MY HENRI.—A thousand thanks for your letter, and for all you are doing for me. Since you wish it I will promise not to lie in wait for that wretched Gallagher, and speak my mind to him; but I should vastly enjoy doing it all the same. I am so glad you thought of your Aunt Melanie. I had entirely forgotten that she was a lay-sister of the Sacramentines at Ghent. Of course she will be the very person through whom to make enquiries concerning the Redemptoristine Sisters. She will know father-confessors by the score, and will find out more in a week than we should in a year. But, oh dear! even a week seems long to wait when I think of Herrick eating his heart out in America, and that poor child in her convent cell trying to get a halo for her head instead of a ring for her finger. Don't try to make me lose heart by telling me that even if you should find out where she is, there'll be little chance of getting her

out of that cell. You don't know Herrick as I do. His will is iron, and his love for this girl strong as death. Now what is there that love and courage combined cannot effect, especially when backed up by enormous wealth. Why he'll go straight to the Pope, and promise to endow any number of convents and churches, if only they'll let him have his darling back again!

"Don't call me heroic. Just now I'm not feeling quite so—well, plucky—as I used to feel. Fighting at one time was the very breath of my life, and I was never so happy as when I was in hot water—I'm sure, in spite of the picture-gallery at Southmoor, that some of my old ancestors must have been rowdy republicans! Now, however, things here are so dismal and gloomy, that I will own to feeling just a trifle limp and spiritless. On Sunday morning Aunt Jo looked so wretchedly ill that I told her I should not go to church, but would stay at home and take care of her. Upon that she gave me a strange, fixed look, and said, in a voice that seemed to come from out a sepulchre, it sounded so hollow, 'Go to church, Honor, and pray while you can.'

"Ah, the luncheon-bell. I must leave off. Adieu.

"Your own,
"HONOR."

"Postscript. Your grammar was atrocious in your last letter—prepositions were anyhow. Also, we don't double our negatives in English—I've told you so times without number—and as for trebling them! I have not never seen it not done! There—put that into decent French if you can."

"Longridge Castle, Saturday.

"MY HENRI,—Only a line to say how delighted I am to get Aunt Mélanie's list of the convents of the Redemptoristines in Europe. I had no idea there were half that number. It is strange, however, with so many in France and Belgium, that there should be only one in Great Britain. Yes, there is a place called Helstone Bridge in Ireland, Co. Cork. I've looked it out in the 'Gazetteer'—kindly note that I spell the word Bridge not Bredge, though I've no doubt Aunt Mélanie so pronounced it to you. I dare say the Convent of Saint Alphonse to which you refer is there, but please find out for certain. The Père Antoine, who is so kindly helping Aunt Mélanie, is a darling, and I would like to tell him so. I suppose he'll enquire now

where the English nuns are sent for their novitiate. When once we find out that, I take it there won't be much difficulty in discovering where Sister Héloïse is. I'm all eagerness for your next letter and the news it may bring; I shall neither eat nor sleep till it comes. Don't be afraid. I get your letters right enough. Uncle John, I hear, used to do the proper thing, and unlock the letter-bag himself, and distribute the letters. Aunt Jo hands over the business to the butler. I stand over the old fogey while he unlocks the bag, seize upon and carry off my letters before he knows where he is.

"In haste to save post,
"Your own,
"HONOR."

"Longridge Castle, Monday.

"MY HENRI,—I'm in a temper. It's downright wicked of you to try and make me lose heart as you do. 'Those who enter in come not out,' you say. Of course not, if they're fully-professed nuns. But our Sister Héloïse is a novice of little over a month's standing. You say the Order is so strict, that nuns or novices may only see their friends once a year; then, if they see they may not speak to them; or, if they wish to speak they must not see them—the nun must be behind a grille. That may be true; but Herrick will have something to say to that grille, I'm confident. And please, please, please don't croak, or I shall lose all patience with you, and Aunt Mélanie, too.

"As I said, I'm in a temper, so think I had better leave off.

"Your own,
"HONOR."

"Longridge Castle, Wednesday.

"MY HENRI,—Jubilate! You are a darling, and Aunt Mélanie is another darling, and Père Antoine is another darling for the help he has given us. But poor little Sister Héloïse! You say she was ill when she went into the convent, and has been ill ever since she has been there! Poor child! No wonder! Just think what it must have cost her to run away from Herrick, loving him as she did! And I've no doubt, too, that Aunt Jo beforehand had nearly frightened her into fits. I felt so angry this morning after getting your letter, that I could scarcely sit through luncheon facing her without speaking my mind right out. I restrained myself, however, for I don't want to sound

an alarm in her ears and set her brain going on some other piece of wickedness. You say a Father Elliot from Saint Elizabeth's, Longridge, took Sister Héloïse to this convent at Helstone Bridge. I made enquiries of my maid, and find that there is a Catholic church about a couple of miles from here; but the Father Elliot of whom you speak left some little time ago to join an African mission. I am so sorry, as I would have gone to him at once and told him the whole sad story—of which no doubt he was ignorant—and entreated his help. I will do as you tell me, and make no effort to see poor little Lois if, as you say, it may cut her off from all possibility of seeing any one else till the close of her novitiate. I think your advice is excellent; and, so soon as Herrick arrives, I will tell him not to waste time quarrelling with Aunt Jo, but to start off at once for Brussels, to consult with you and Aunt Mélanie and Père Antoine as to what should be his first step—one first false step, as you say, may ruin everything. I heartily hope he is half-way across the Atlantic by now. If only I knew by what steamer he was coming, I would contrive somehow to meet him at Liverpool, and send him straight on to you at once.

"Oceans of gratitude to you, to Aunt Mélanie, and to Père Antoine, without whom we should have found out nothing. I shall end this letter as I began it, with a cry of jubilate. And joyful I mean to be in spite of all your croaking and the churchyardiness of things here. There is no other word but churchyardiness that would give you any idea of the dismalness, the silence, the utter absence of 'go' in the house just now. Why, compared with it, Southmoor was a downright cheerful place of abode, even with the wind in the east, and mother at a very low ebb. To add to the general dreariness of things I have somehow managed to catch a very severe cold. And no wonder! The dear, bright frost has gone; a wretched thaw has set in; and the rain is coming down in buckets. But, all the same, I mean to be joyful. Everything will come straight, I feel confident. Such a combination of wisdom and courage as you, and I, and Herrick represent, must—shall—will carry all before it. Adieu.

"Ever your own,

"HONOR.

"As I wrote my last word, the sound of wheels made me look up and out of the window, and, lo! there was the crawling

old fly from the Wrexford 'Railway Hotel' bringing a visitor up the drive. I strained my neck to see the visitor alight, and who should it be but 'The Serpent,' in a mackintosh and slouch hat. I wonder what wickedness he'll be dinning into Aunt Jo's ears now!"

THE MILL OF THE WORLD.

YOU can hardly realise the nature of this wonderful mill unless you cast back your thoughts a decade or two, and then calmly reflect upon the present and the past side by side. It doesn't matter much what you are—whether assistant to a retail grocer in a small way in a small town, or my Lord Tomnoddy. You have been ground this way and that in the course of the last few years, so that you are vastly changed from your old self. Even the shrewd, prudent gentlemen and ladies past their prime, who, being in the possession of a competence, and in no humour to get their faces prematurely wrinkled in the thick of the world's strife, think to preserve themselves from change by nestling in pastoral retreats, where they hear nothing more annoying than the buzz of a bee—even they don't escape scot-free. They may have much the same faces that they had; but the mill has been grinding away at their minds all the more; and though they may not think it, they are really in no better a plight than the Londoner with a crow's-foot at each eye.

We go into it "this," and we come out "that."

Perhaps no one is more surprised at the transformation than we ourselves are; but, as a rule, we have no time to spare in uttering, "Did you ever see such a difference!" or, "What a change, to be sure!" and the like remarks of wonder. When we do have an odd moment or two at disposal for such unprofitable communings, we prefer to devote them to our friends and relatives. The change in them is infinitely more sensational; and we never tire of reflecting upon the oddness of it. Of course, we are to them what they are to us; but that we do not mind, even if the idea that it is so occurs to us.

How absurd the various forecasts about us, which our fond old grandparents and other antediluvian relations made bold to proclaim, upon the strength of their wisdom

and experience! They had by that time gone through the mill—been right well squeezed by it, so that little or none of the nonsense of youth was left in them. They had all the angles of conceit, and independence, and individuality shorn off them; and so they ought to have seemed to us representatives of human nature purged from its dross, and deserving that we should go upon our knees before it. But, as a matter of fact, they seemed to us nothing of the kind. If they did not give us half-crowns and kisses—or, at least, a sixpence and a glass of wine, with a good large piece of currant-cake—they were disagreeable old things, fit only to be laughed at. All their hard-earned wisdom was not worth a snap of the finger to us. If they prattled about it to us, we went right off to sleep, and left them sighing about the frivolity of the young. And if by any chance we listened to some of it, we understood it not.

The dear old things, however, have not the smallest likelihood of knowing what is to happen to us in the aftertime. They say of Tommy, for example, because he is always so self-assertive, and greedy, and so fond of punching his little sister, that he is "a born soldier," and must sooner or later go to Sandhurst and the war somewhere. Tommy has no objection; and, to prove that he is as valorous as they think he is, he kicks his nurse hard in the small of her back. Yet, when he gets on the threshold of manhood, there's next to nothing of the old Tommy left. No longer does the infantine "soldier" mania stir within him. Grandmamma has gone to her green grave in the churchyard, and there is a white stone, with a text on it, set over her. And grandmamma's prophecies have turned out quite wrong. Tommy has, by this time, a set, ambitious face. But he is not at all ambitious about glory. Others may run after that, if they please. For his part, he means to make a pot of money before any of his brothers, and to buy the ancestral estate—now in the hands of some one else—with his accumulations long ere he is forty.

Poor grandmamma! The mill of the world had taught her much; yet it had not taught her that we are all will-o'-the-wisps, and that even she was powerless to say which of her dear daughter's children would turn up trumps, and which should wander away from the nest with an early blot upon their good name.

Neither she nor any one else, for example, would have foretold a shady future

for so staid a child as James. Though gifted with an excellent constitution, that would have made crying "for nothing" a real pleasure to him, and in the possession of limbs that seemed made to do what they ought not to do, James never misbehaved in the nursery. He slept like a dormouse as soon as he was put to bed, submitted to the bath with Christian composure, and never indulged in those heated outbursts of temper which marked Tommy, or his sister Bella, as "the naughtiest child that ever was." James early viewed life from a calm standpoint. He was "a born parson," of course. That is always what mothers, and aunts, and grandmamas, and lady visitors say of the boy who is so appallingly good, that he does not snatch at things, and who does not, in other ways, clearly show his primeval badness. They set him upon a high chair, and make him read something, just to have an idea how he will look in the pulpit. He, nothing ashamed, does as he is bidden, and in a clear voice, takes his text from "Mother Hubbard," or "The House that Jack built." He is fluent and self-possessed. That settles it. He must, he shall be a clergyman. The white night-gown they attire him in, jestfully, serves as a sort of preliminary consecration.

However, when the time comes, James thinks he knows a trick worth two of that. He frequents race-meetings, and keeps late hours. His old coolness is still a feature in him; but he has no notion of turning it to account in the church. And in the end, sad to say, he becomes a famous black sheep long before most of his contemporaries have lost the lamblike reputation that ought to be the amiable mark of their youth.

How grandmamma, poor soul, would raise her thin, mitted hands, and look up at the ceiling, if she were still alive to behold such things! But by this time she has done with the world and its mill altogether, and has become peaceful powder under the grass in the churchyard.

Until we are pushed into the world's factory, we are all pretty much alike. No one can say for certain, whether this youth or that has in him the making of anything. At the first turn of the grindstone, he may flinch, and wail, and ask to be set free, that he may go somewhere else, and live in his own way. Or, though ever so pale, and weakly looking, he may seem to get sudden strength under the trial that is put

upon him, and may become more and more able and self sufficient, the more he is pruned and pressed.

The world is not altogether tyrannical, though it is rather an exacting master. It does not always go on grinding away at the youth who cries out that he has had enough of it. We are free agents in a great measure, spite of Mr. Calvin and others. Our sensitive friend is quite at liberty to follow his humour, if he has a banking account of sufficient importance. He may retire from the hubbub, and take a cottage on the side of a hill, or by the shore of a lake, and there spend all his days in peace, and self-congratulations about his narrow escape from the fell work of the grindstone. And he may marry and rear a family of innocent little lambkins, and never go within fifty miles of the great metropolis, where the cruellest mill of all is kept constantly whirling, shaping a man one minute, crushing a man the next, now training a hobbledohoy into a genius, now knocking out the brains of a fool who thought himself a great man, and ever oiled with the blood of the living and the dead round about it. But he is sure not to be entirely content with himself, though his life and surroundings be ever so idyllic, his wife ever so careful to give him nice made dishes, and his children ever so good and beautiful.

There is no putting a stop to that disagreeable echo of "coward! coward!" which sounds for aye in his ears. 'Tis in vain that he argues the matter out. He is a shrewd hand at logic: that is one of the accomplishments he has matured in his country solitudes, to the purling of crystal streams, and the morning songs of the larks. What is it to anybody if he chooses to live the life he does live? Does he wrong any living soul? Is he committing a sin against Heaven or nature? How absurd to think so! Rather, he is doing the best possible for himself and the world, whose grindstone hurt his nose so infernally. The world ought to thank him for the ten children of whom he is the responsible parent, and whose dear little noses will all in due time become large enough to be introduced to the grindstone in their turn. Moreover, he is not idle, that he should be reproached for the shameful inertia of his days. He is daily occupied in enlarging his collection of birds, and beetles, and butterflies, and grasses, and bits of rock. Also, he writes papers for the entertainment, nay, the support

and sustenance of his fellow-creatures elsewhere, who must need such elegant pastimes, seeing how terribly they have been scarred and knocked about by that cruel grindstone. Is he not then a positive benefactor to the race?

But, for all that, the cry "coward! coward!" dins within him; and neither wife, nor made dishes, nor perfect health, and sweet, clear mountain air, nor fair, angelic little children, nor the consciousness of his freedom from the restraints which gall those whom the world has bound hard to its machinery, when it has duly fashioned them into the shapes it loves best to see—none of these, nor all together, can make him contented with himself. He will carry that awful chorus of "coward! coward!" to the grave with him.

Having looked on the one picture for awhile, it now behoves us to turn and look at the opposite picture. It is truly marvellous with what fortitude and heroism some of the candidates bear the ordeal of the grindstone. They themselves are astonished hardly less than the bystanders. Until the day of trial, they were not thought to have much of the right stuff in them. But the deceit of appearances is once again proven in their case.

They do not like it at the outset. That may indeed be said of all. But they do not give in. Perhaps they bear it nobly for a time, until they are on the point of screaming like the child who thrusts its little, exploring fingers into a pot of boiling water upon the fire. They may even begin to scream. No matter. It is no disgrace to them, if they cannot help it. The grindstone does, out of question, hurt some more than others. It is not screaming, or forbearing to scream, but enduring that indicates the successful candidate. He will do the world's work for it none the less well when he is released from the grindstone itself, though he screamed till the five continents echoed with his cries.

Once through the novitiate, however, and a turn for the better is at hand. Gone, like the visions of a dream, are by this time the trivial hopes and infantine illusions with which he was tight stuffed ere the grindstone began to play upon him. You see the change in his face. He is one of the enlightened. His is not the sort of enlightenment that the followers of Gautama the Good shoot the arrow of their will at. By no means. On the contrary, indeed. The believers in the earthly paradise of Buddha are bound to extinguish

those very passions and energies which our friend is convinced are his mainstay and supreme endowment. He is pledged to exercise them as far as they will go, now that he has been initiated into the world's mysteries. The Buddhist may snuff them out, or try to, if he pleases. It is no affair of our friend's. Each man must follow his humour, the rush of the powers that are in him, and the beliefs that are the rudder of his powers.

When you are used to it, the clamour and screech of the grindstone is no such discordant sound. It makes you stop your ears for awhile, and look this way and that for escape. By-and-by, however, it becomes less and less disagreeable, and, after a time, you prefer it to the sweetest of other symphonies. Your cousin, some hundreds of miles away among the mountains and lakes, may, if he can, tolerate the larks, and nightingales, and blackbirds which form his choir. For your part, the hum of the machine, the shouts of some who have passed the trial, the groans of others who are in the thick of it, and even the despairing shrieks of those who find it too much for them, and know full well that it is killing them—all this is a sweeter music than any other that is extant.

You are among the privileged. Perhaps you have laboured so assiduously through your apprenticeship, and in the beginning of your efforts at independence, that you get appointed a sort of overseer in the working of the machinery of the grindstone itself. 'Tis a most desirable situation, though in the old days you would have shuddered to think you could ever occupy it. It needs a hard heart, or rather a well-disciplined one. You have, however, learnt how to keep that little morsel of flesh and blood, which is supposed to be the abode of your sensibilities, well under control.

There's excitement enough then for you, and no mistake. It is a noble position, too, although it has such a grim look to the pale-faced, trembling candidates, who step past you one by one: men and women, boys and girls, and children just able to toddle through the mire of the workshops! Now and then one of them trips and falls. He is alarmed still more to find that he has stumbled over a dead body. It is one of the victims. He also may be a victim in like manner, if he does not brace himself. What a dust there is in the air; and how the throb and roar of the

machines which work the grindstones seems to shake the entire establishment!

It is a noble position in this way. Once promoted to a close connection with the wheels and springs of the machine, our friend may play a generous part towards these men and women, made of flesh, and blood, and bone like himself, and filled with the same hopes, and fears, and doubts, which once struggled within him. The grindstone presses harder upon some than upon others. It is a defect of the thing which has existed ever since the machine itself was set in motion. Some say it is a defect that cannot be remedied; but the more experience a man has of the world and its working, the less he is content to believe that this is so. The higher he rises in the rank of those who attend to the machinery, the more convinced he becomes that it is possible to improve things, and make the grindstone a less cruel and destructive test of the nature of the candidates. And once this belief is firmly fastened within him, he is able to think less about the pale, anxious faces that pass by him, than about the future, when the candidates shall be neither pale nor anxious, but hopeful and confident. That future, he trusts, may be, in great part, forged by himself and those whom he has won to his way of thinking.

With aspirations like these ever in his mind, and wedded to the world of which the grindstone is the vestibule, our friend thus lives on and on, until he dies and is buried. A marble monument then commemorates him, and records his works, for the encouragement of others.

It is possible that the cousin among the rocks and lakes lives a good many years longer. It is probable, also, if so, that he grows weary of the length of his days, and sighs for the chance of dying "in harness," as it is called, like his relation in town, who was never more beloved than when he was on his death-bed.

Ah! it is a glorious old mill, this of the world, in spite of its defects; and they only may revile it who have never faced it. We enter it weak, and leave it strong. It changes us from puppies into men. What if the grindstone does bereave us of this or that quality which we thought the choicest in our wallet? 'Tis only to give us assurance that we have other gifts of far more worth, and which would else have been hid by the attribute we prized so much.

TWO SISTERS IN BLACK.

I FIRST met them in a Folkestone hotel, where I had elected to tarry until the Channel breezes should have moderated somewhat. In the reading-room after dinner there were very few guests. A young lady and a young gentleman, obviously bride and bridegroom, sat at the centre table, turning over a volume of the "Graphic," and covertly giggling at the snoring of an old gentleman, who had secured the one comfortable easy-chair; and the two sisters had ranged themselves one on either side of the fireplace. Though each one held a volume in her hand, there was an air about them which proclaimed that reading was somewhat of an effort, and that any chance comer might hazard a remark of general conversation without much risk of a rebuff. At first I had not noticed any great disparity in their age; but Miss Shaw, who took up the word in answer to my preliminary observation, at once gave me to understand that she stood, as it were, in "loco parentis" to her sister, Miss Lucy, whom she treated as a young thing just out of the schoolroom. Miss Shaw was slight in figure, with a dark, strenuous face; and Miss Lucy was stout, a lymphatic blonde, not very neat in her attire; and one might easily have failed to notice at a first glance that she was some years the younger of the two. They were now attired, as on every other occasion when I came across them, in black stuff dresses, which looked as if they had been made the year before last, and not very carefully treated since.

We talked as people generally talk who exchange words as an alternative preferable to the exclusive company of their own thoughts; and it was not long before I detected the buzzing of the bee which had made its habitation in good Miss Shaw's bonnet. Her own particular bee was that this sister of hers, whom she had mothered since babyhood, was a lovely and attractive girl—a fit match for the highest in the land; and so deeply absorbed had she become in her guardian's mission, that she forgot to mark the lapse of time. To an outsider it would have seemed that Miss Lucy ran very little danger from the wolf of society, who is supposed to be lurking at every corner on the look-out for wealth and beauty; but Miss Shaw would have stood aghast had Sylphie—for so she had named her exceedingly substantial charge

—proposed to go shopping by herself, or to mix with the rank and fashion of the promenade. She seemed, however, to have no apprehensions with regard to myself—a circumstance which might either show that she found nothing wolf-like in me, or support another hypothesis somewhat offensive to my "amour propre."

The sisters, I learned, were at this time without any fixed abode. They had given up the gloomy London house where they had lived since the death of their father.

"I didn't think it was right that Sylphie, with her good looks, should be kept boxed up in town, and meeting nobody else but the dullest of people poor papa had gathered round him," Miss Shaw informed me. "Sylphie is the rich one of the family; for, in addition to her share from poor papa, she has a nice fortune left to her by her godmother, Miss Tyndrum. We neither of us cared to spend our money over a house and a lot of lazy servants; and, for many things, hotel life is much nicer, though, of course, one has to be very careful in the matter of casual acquaintances, and doubly so in my position of guardian to an attractive girl with a nice fortune."

Miss Shaw had known me about an hour when she made this speech; and, if it told of her careful practice, I could not help wondering what she might be capable of in her careless moods. As I have already remarked, the case did not seem to be one requiring excessive caution. If it had not been for Miss Shaw's freely tendered confidences, I, for one—and my eye is a fairly practical one—should never have set down Miss Lucy either as a beauty or an heiress; and, again, confidences like these, offered gratis in the first hour of an acquaintance, are apt to provoke suspicions from the veteran hotel-dweller. The tale of the heiress, in a case like hers, is one they often hear, and hearing, they remember that ladies of fortune do not often go about in clothes as dowdy as Miss Lucy's; and as to her good looks—well, personal beauty is in most cases a matter of taste, and I fancy that most people would agree with me in describing her as an untidy, commonplace-looking young woman of thirty or thereabouts.

Miss Shaw went on to tell me that this visit to Folkestone had been undertaken with the view of letting Miss Lucy see something of military society; but up to the present things had not worked quite satisfactorily.

"We have a cousin down here who holds a high appointment in the Quarter-master's department at Shorncliffe; and he, of course, might have put us in the way of all sorts of gaiety, but for some reason or other Henry has only thought fit to take us out for a sail, which made Sylphie so ill that she had to stop in bed all the next day, and to ask us to afternoon tea to meet the surgeon's wife, and her three great overgrown daughters, though since we have been here there have been three balls, for which he might easily have got us tickets, besides any number of private dances, and concerts, and receptions; but Henry's mother was not a nice person. She came of trading people from Yorkshire, and Henry takes after her, and not after our side. He is purse-proud, and doesn't care to be seen about with us, because we don't spend a lot of money in display, and have a private room here, and a carriage, just as if the best people didn't always make the least show. But I mean to let Henry see that we're not in the least dependent upon him for society; we are going to start to-morrow for Aix-les-Bains, and we have introductions to the Chisholms, most charming people, who are now staying there.

From all I hear about them, I'm pretty sure that Sylphie is just the girl they'll take to; and, in that case, she'll have any amount of gaiety, and get to know all the best people."

Not for a moment did good Miss Shaw speculate as to how she herself would fare at Aix-les-Bains. All her thoughts were bent on working out her manifest destiny, which, as she viewed it, was to bring before the world's notice this brilliant and beautiful sister of hers. "Oh, blessed delusion," I thought, "what reality could give Miss Shaw half the happiness she gets from you? Without the kindly veil you throw over her eyes, she might perhaps have taken to backbiting, or to the knitting of amorphous woollen garments, like the one now lying upon Miss Lucy's lap. She might even have taken to the platform."

Cousin Henry, of course, ought to have treated their homely appearance as a matter of no moment, and have introduced them to "the best people," trusting them to make a good impression by their sterling qualities; but his courage seems to have failed him. I fancy there is a cousin Henry in most families.

The following June I came across them

again in town, and I naturally enquired how they had fared at Aix-les-Bains. A murmur of deprecation escaped Miss Lucy's lips; but Miss Shaw at once cut in, and gave me an account of their adventures. "Oh, we didn't like the place at all. It was full of invalids and foreigners, and really the Chisholms behaved most strangely to us. We called, of course, and, will you believe it, the only notice they took of us was to send their cards by their servant. They didn't even ask us to their weekly evening receptions, though the friends who gave us the introduction said they would certainly invite us to dinner at once. The fact is, they had their villa, and their carriages, and their troops of servants, and they didn't take to us because we lived in a quiet way; but that is always the case, except amongst the best people, who take you for what you are, and not for what you spend. We are going down to Tenby in the course of a few weeks, and there we shall meet the Elphinstones, most delightful people, who have a place in Scotland, close to Glen Cannock, where Sylphie's godmother, Miss Tyndrum, used to live, and there the child, I expect, will have plenty of society of the right sort."

I never heard how the campaign at Tenby prospered; but I think it highly probable that the introduction to the Elphinstones may have proved just as fatuous as that to the Chisholms. Four years passed before I met the sisters again, and then I came across them at a noisy hotel at Harrogate where I was staying. One evening I marked them amongst the new arrivals at the bottom of the table.

"I hear this is such a charming hotel," said Miss Shaw, when we met in the hall after dinner. "So much gaiety and friendliness. Just the place for Sylphie."

Then, when the young lady departed to search for her knitting, Miss Shaw enquired of me whether I didn't think she was prettier than ever.

Stouter Miss Lucy certainly was, and perhaps a thought dowdier in her attire as well; but of course I couldn't tell her good sister my real impression, and the lie I told to answer her query must, I think, be classed as one of the whitest known. There was a dance in the hotel that evening. The sisters were early in the drawing-room, and established themselves in a position where they could not well be overlooked; but four or five dances passed

without any one asking for an introduction.

I knew very few of the male folk; but I managed to beguile one youngster into their vicinity, with the view of securing him for Miss Lucy; but when he saw the bulk of the lady whom he was expected to pilot round the room, he stopped, faltered an excuse, and fled. I made another attempt with the same result, and poor Sylphie bloomed as a wall-flower the whole evening.

The next morning Miss Shaw's opinion of the hotel had completely changed. She had never seen such a set of people in her life—vulgar, purse-proud wretches, who had let a lady sit without dancing all the evening, because she wasn't dressed out in silks, and satins, and diamonds; just as if the best people would bring their family jewels to a place like Harrogate. But the set in the hotel had no other chance of showing off its finery; so perhaps one ought not to be surprised at the display, vile taste as it was.

Miss Shaw was for moving on at once; but there was opposition to this on the part of the manageress, who declared that, as Miss Shaw had engaged her rooms at a reduced price by the week, she would have to pay the week's charge whether she stayed or went. Miss Shaw could not bring herself to pay for rooms which other people might be occupying. So, after a stormy scene, she agreed to stay the week out.

Poor Miss Lucy was by no means anxious to leave, though the chief affront had been put upon her. She didn't really care for dancing, and she had struck up an acquaintance with an old lady who had similar tastes in the matter of knitting patterns with herself; and she had found some favourite yellow-backed novels in the reading-room.

"I like this place," she said to me one day, "and I hate this constant moving on. Louisa has got it into her head that I ought to go into society; but what society should we find, living as we do! The people she wants to know always turn up their noses at us after they have known us a week. Louisa is clever enough at most things, and I do wonder she can't see this. And she's always worrying me about getting married; but I—I don't want to marry anybody."

A fine blush here came over Miss Lucy's countenance, which made me suspect that

her aversion to matrimony might have its limits. As likely as not she had found her ideal, and her heart had made its choice of some one having no pretensions to be classed with the "best people," that elusive race with whom her active-minded sister in vain sought fellowship. Supposing this hypothesis of mine to be correct, I can well imagine why she kept her secret close from Miss Shaw. She would have needed high courage indeed to have unfolded a tale like this.

The next morning I bade them good-bye, and never again, from that day, have our paths crossed. Poor Miss Lucy! I often wonder what has been her fate, and where she is now. Has she accomplished that great matrimonial coup upon which Miss Shaw had set her heart, or is she still being spirited on from place to place in pursuit of other "charming people," who, after the heartless fashion of the Chisholms, will surely learn to look another way as soon as they catch sight of Miss Shaw's many-tinted waterproof, and Miss Lucy's wonderfully-constructed hat.

No doubt it is wrong and snobbish in the highest degree that the sisters should be viewed askance because they do not occupy grand suites of rooms, or drink costly wines, or ride about in a carriage—and I believe they could very well afford to give themselves all these luxuries; but the world into which Miss Shaw is so anxious to introduce her pearl of a sister, sets great store upon them, and equally dislikes cheeseparing, and frouzy clothes, and lofty back hotel bedrooms. It never recognises the claims of character, or manners, or moral worth in those whose exterior does not bear the proper stamp; and it only thaws to those who live their lives on its own indolent, luxurious lines. Miss Shaw, before she can conquer this world, and bask in its smiles, must recognise this fact, and spend some of her hoarded guineas in equipping herself and her sister with the trappings which it demands its members to wear as uniform; but this task, I fancy, will be beyond her powers. She will go on as she began, hoping to win the prize in her own way, never rising to the point of spending her whole income, and perhaps some of her savings as well. The habit of lavishing money on unaccustomed luxuries is one very difficult to acquire by any one who has ever known the full charm of Byron's "Good old gentlemanly vice."

HAPPINESS.

"THOU shalt be happy!" So I told my heart
 One summer morning many a year ago:
 "Thou shalt be happy; thou shalt have thy part
 Of mirth and feasting in the great world's show.
 Thou shalt have health and wealth, high fame and
 praise,
 Thy place shall be with those who sit above;
 Thou shalt have sunshine on the dullest days,
 And, best of all, my heart, thou shalt have love."
 Thus, in the morning of my days, I spake
 Unto my heart, and gladly it replied:
 "The world is all before us, we can make
 Joy for ourselves, a never-ebbing tide."
 So we set out, my heart and I, in mirth,
 To seek for happiness—upon the earth.

God gave us health and wealth, and we were glad
 Thus, for a season, waiting joys to come;
 God gave us fame and praise, a little sad
 We were, my heart and I, amid the hum
 Of voices lauding us, till one, more dear
 Than all the rest, spake gentle words and sweet.
 Then we grew jubilant with right good cheer,
 And happiness came on with flying feet,
 Drew near—but passed. Alas! my heart and I,
 We could not hold the radiant wanderer fast.
 One rose-touch of her lips in fleeting by
 Was ours; one precious look—the first, the last.
 She will return, we said, with love's new birth,
 There must be happiness for us on earth.

We lost fair health, my heart and I, and fell
 Sore sick; were sorrowful, found dreary ways.
 We lost our wealth, and none drew near to tell
 Of comfort waiting us in better days.
 But where is happiness? Alack! we find
 She is not ours to beckon as we list;
 We have no magic spell wherewith to bind
 This rare, bright visitant to earth. We missed
 The royal road to happiness; but lo!
 Something is saved us from the wreck of all:
 We have content, though doubtful blessings go,
 And peace entwines our crosses great and small.
 We learn, my heart and I, the world's true worth,
 And seek for happiness—but not on earth.

WITH THE FLEET AT THE NORE.

In these latter days, London does not see much of the British Fleet. It was different in the time of "Nelson of the Nile," when ships of the line were built at Deptford, and a wherry would take you for a shilling from London Bridge stairs into the midst of the Royal Navy. There was Rotherhithe, a favourite haunt of Jack ashore, and Whitechapel, full of crimps and prize agents. Then press-gangs harried the sailors' taverns from Blackwall to Blackfriars, and roystering groups of men-o-war's men enlivened the City pavements. When Molly melodiously reproaches her Tom, from whom she last parted at "Wapping Old Stairs,"

Though you promised last Sunday to walk in the Mall,
 With Susan from Deptford, and likewise with Sall,

it may be that Pall Mall is the chosen rendezvous, where the sight of Tom, surrounded by sirens, would nowadays excite the mild astonishment of the denizens of Clubland.

But it is not with the past we have now to do; but with the cheerful bustle of the City of to-day, in a morning when the whole scene is dappled by sunshine, and the moving shadows of the clouds, shadows which soon chase the omnibuses up Gracechurch Street, and set a portentous darkness upon London Bridge, through which shines the white, comely tower of Saint Mary Overy.

The connecting-link between the Old Swan Pier—a very old swan by this time, and rather decrepid as to the pinions, but still doing cheerful business with down-the-river ports—is to be found in the big, handsome steamer, "Glen Rosa," which is whistling a hoarse intimation that it is time to be under weigh, if we mean to start. A good many passengers are already on board, and have taken front seats on what may be called the hurricane-deck: girls with their sweethearts; family parties, with hampers and baskets, and a plentiful supply of children, who chase each other up and down; young honeymooners, who seek retired corners. Old cronies, too, there are in the way of workmen, who share 'bacca-box, and hunk of cheese and loaf of bread in common, but who take in all the pleasures of the voyage with a freshness of feeling that others may be envious of—such as a solitary, dejected figure here and there, who seems to be taking the trip like so much physic, according to the prescription of his medical adviser.

"Well, we're in for a good, long, happy day!" cries an evident son of Crispin, with a wrinkled time-worn smile of deep enjoyment, at which the solitary, who has perhaps left his liver behind in sultry Hindustan, sighs a heartfelt sigh, and wishes evidently that he could say the same.

And then we squeeze under London Bridge, and between the big granite abutments of the new Tower Bridge—no squeezing there—which will soon be a prominent, if not ornamental feature upon Thames stream. The tide is on the ebb—so much on the ebb, indeed, that wharves and warehouses are all aground, as it were, with the steamers and other craft that may be lying alongside, and a broad strip of gravel or mud borders that part of the

river which is still a going concern, and the big dock-gates are revealed, down to their very cills, with here and there the nose of a big steamer showing high above our heads. And as we speed down the river in the haze and glare of the summer noon, the low banks of the river seem altogether remote, and out of the way of observation, and none of the scenes we are passing present themselves with any distinctness.

It is a time for tobacco, and for a lazy perusal of the morning papers, the zest of which is not impaired by any noisy newsboys shouting the announcement of their "evening" successors. Meantime, the baskets and hampers are opened, the children run races up and down the decks, while corks are popping, and meat-pies and jam-tarts are conscientiously disposed of. But in spite of this preliminary skirmish, when the ship's dinner-bell is rung as a reminder, that if we are to join the British Fleet, it is as well to have all our stores on board, a respectable contingent is found marshalled on each side of the very nicely-arranged tables.

And the good fare, with the accompaniment of the automatic jingle and shake of the glasses and bottles, the tremor of the engines, and the tramping on the deck overhead, suggest reminiscences of other more lengthened voyages. An American, while admitting the squareness of the present meal, glorifies the elaborate feeding to be had on board the Atlantic liners; while one of the solitaires—who looks, perhaps, a shade less miserable than when he started—ventures a mild criticism on the cuisine of the P. and O. boats, as compared with the French Messageries. And a lady very justly observes that it is a comfort to think that there is no great show of scenery to be missed by taking your meals with due deliberation; while, on those Highland boats, with their too tempting fare, you might miss your Ben Nevis at breakfast, sacrifice the beauties of Loch Lomond in favour of an early dinner, and quite lose the effect of sunset on Cuchullam by oversolicitude as to your evening meal.

And so by the time we are fairly settled on deck again, we have caught the breeze that is blowing across Sea Reach. A really briny feeling is in the air. Southend Pier is in sight, with the Nore Light-ship in the distance, and over there, steaming softly away in the distance, anchored in the river, or showing as a clump of masts

in the opening by Sheerness, lies the British Fleet, or, at least, as much of it as has made its rendezvous by the Nore.

But already the British Fleet is on the move. Some of the faster cruisers are already almost lost to sight in the vague distance of Thames mouth, where the ships are hanging in a dreamy kind of haze. And as the flood-tide comes hurrying in, other ships are seen stealing away towards the sea, while now and then a curl of white smoke darts over the surface of the water and the roar of a gun is heard, softened by the distance, suggesting a reminiscence of that famous sea song anent our good old Britannia, whose home is on the deep:

With thunder from her native oak
She quells the floods below,
As they roar, on the shore,
When the stormy winds do blow.

But where are the hearts of oak by now, and the wooden walls where they found their appropriate home? Oak is too splintery a material for sailors' hearts in these days; they must be of the best hardened steel, hammered and rolled. Indeed, at the sight of the great, wallowing, ugly monsters that have replaced the graceful war ships of old times, one cannot help feeling that the courage required from those who have to sail in and fight these iron-sheathed ships, is of a higher, more enduring quality than even that which led our naval heroes of other days from victory to victory. They, too, had the fierce excitement of actual combat, fighting man to man, with bullet, and shot, and cutlass; while our sailors of to-day have to deal with diabolic engines of unknown power, of which the efficacy has hardly been tested in actual combat; but which seem to threaten destruction as much to those who use them, as to the enemy against whom they are directed. And then these torpedoes—the stoutest heart that ever beat must quail at the thought of the wholesale destruction of the best and bravest, to be wrought by the success of one of these fiendish emissaries.

It is against these last modern monsters that the section of the British Fleet now under weigh has especially to guard. Most of the ships that are now disappearing, hull down, in the distance, belong to Admiral Lyons' reserve squadron, and will rendezvous at Portland, where they will be for some time, exposed to the attacks of torpedo flotillas from the op-

posite coast. Hence the ceaseless watch; the sea swept by electric beams as long as darkness lasts; and every faculty on the stretch to detect the almost invisible midge-like enemy, whose touch involves a happily-imaginary destruction. But in actual warfare captains and admirals must grow old ere their time from the strain of the terrible responsibility, and we may hear of hair turned white in a single night, under such new and strange conditions.

Our captain does not venture to pursue the retiring fleet. Even one of those tiny gunboats would knock us to matches with the greatest ease; and not one of those little craft, wallowing gunwale under in the swell of the mightier craft, would care to waste a torpedo over us. And so we are steered straight for Sheerness Fort, fanned by the freshest of breezes and with the green waters seething under our prow; such a halcyon scene as one could embellish with all kinds of allegoric figures:

With pearly shell the Tritons all the while
Sound the sea-march and guide to Sheppey Isle.

And then a fort from the Horseshoe opens fire with two big guns, and we hear the bolts speeding overhead with the roar and rattle of express trains. Imagine an enemy's iron-clad off-shore, and the suspense of watching the flight of those tremendous missiles! What would happen when steel met steel? Who can say? As it is, the shots strike the water in good line, but a little short of the targets. Two great fountains of spray spring into the air, and other smaller fountains appear, duck-and-drake fashion, in the distance as the shots ricochet harmlessly along.

"Yonder goes the 'Arethusa,'" cries a seafaring man with a telescope, who is reconnoitring the disappearing ships. Ah! it is something, in the flesh to have beheld even the taper masts of the "saucy 'Arethusa.'" What memories of old sea fights the very name brings to mind:

'Twas with the spring fleet she went out,
The English Channel to cruise about;
When four French sails in show so stout
Bore down on the "Arethusa."

"And there's the old 'Hydra' and 'Glatton,'" continues our naval authority, "why, Sheerness Dockyard won't know itself without them old creaks. And the 'Iron Duke's' gone too, and the 'How-dacious,' don't think much of them—with all the Coastguard men—why, Sheerness must have bust itself with all the work there's been."

But Sheerness is quieting down now; the few ships left in the harbour are riding quietly at their moorings, the men's shirts hanging in festoons to dry, and hardly a sign of life to be seen. All the bustle is over, the unloading of powder barges, the shipping of stores, the dash to and fro of men-o'-war's boats, the seamen clustered on the quays, or standing at ease under the shade of the naval barracks, waiting to have their kits inspected. All the ordered turmoil is over, and Sheerness is taking a nap again, this sunny, lazy afternoon.

There are the brown and ruddy dock-yard buildings, with two or three small cruisers in dry dock, showing their yellow funnels over the walls, with pleasant patches of verdure here and there, and a spit of yellow sand beyond, where the white forts make face to the river front. Black, dismantled hulks hang about the harbour, and an old wall-sided ironclad, showing the varied hues of a sea-shell on its weather-beaten planks. Beyond, opens out the wide, glittering waterway that leads to Chatham, that great depôt of our naval power; but there is nothing more warlike going that way than a little fleet of red-sailed barges, such as carry those great haystacks to London markets, but empty now, and tacking and reaching for home, which, perhaps, after all, is not Chatham way, but up the Swale, where Faversham lies, half bucolic and half maritime. Sea-gulls, too, sweep about in flocks, and the wide sky is flecked with clouds that have borrowed their hues from the flashing sea.

And in the distance lie the peaceful hills—the pleasant downs of Kent—over which the sun, beginning to decline, sheds radiant beams through crevices in the clouds, showing the soft outlines far away crowned with tufted trees or crested by some ancient tumulus.

But we have not long to stay at Sheerness. Do its streets invite a visit? Not much, for we have been there before; and now that the sailors are gone, there is not much to attract in the queer-looking town, with its wooden shanties, and sailors' and soldiers' grog-shops, and cheap refreshment-rooms, which is the only part of Sheerness within our reach. As for Sheerness-on-Sea, we must leave that for another time, for already our boat is beginning to show signs of departure, and, before long, we are once more in the tide-way and heading back to London town.

But what a marvellous change in the aspect of the river. With a full tide, and the evening light upon river and landscape, the dull stream of the midday glare is now under a spell of enchantment. Green meadows, and cornfields already yellow with ripening corn, soft hills, and green copses, pleasant taverns smiling from sunny slopes, with yachts spreading their white sails, or luffing softly to their moorings.

Now white forts shine from their leafy screens, and Tilbury, with its ancient, weather-beaten face, its red chimneys peering over the green glaciis, its memories of Elizabeth and the Armada, passes us by all radiant with sunset glow. And the pale moon shines upon pleasant, homely Gravesend, where a whole fleet of steamers and yachts are dancing upon the tide.

How ghostly looks the old "Trafalgar," shut up, and hung with advertisement boards, where shades of distinguished whitebaiters, and heroes of the "Coningsby" period, may be fancied looking out from the dead, blank windows and balconies.

Great steamers, too, bear down, hailing for foreign climes, with passengers clustering on the decks, and waving cheerful adieux. All is movement, colour, and charm, till the fading light brings gloomier tones into the picture.

And then we are a little bit jolly on board, too. Have we not the band at work, and do not its strains send all the young people jigging and dancing? There is one delightful, gipsy-looking young woman, who dances! How she dances! now a pas seul, with delicious "verve" and "abandon." And then a jovial sea-captain catches the infection. Dance he must, though a prudent wife would restrain him; and now he flings about in an inspired hornpipe. And the gipsy, how she foots it. Shade of T. P. Cooke! You never had such a partner as that. Why, even a staid, respectable City man, with an irreproachable, silver-mounted umbrella, has caught the infection, and capers nimbly in a corner. It is a veritable tarantula. Luckily the spectre of London Bridge, shining white in the distance, puts a check on the enthusiasm.

"I mean to come this way every week," says a debarking passenger, overflowing with satisfaction.

But we may come many times, and yet get no further sight of the British Fleet.

MORE ABOUT HOPS.

EVERYTHING that grows out of the earth, and all creatures that live upon it, are liable to disease. The vegetation diseases go by the general name of blight. The higher you go in the ranks of vegetation, and the more the life-forces of the plant are stimulated by artificial means, the greater liability there is to disease. This holds good in the case of the hop. It is liable to many diseases and various forms of "blight."

The fly, the louse, the rust, the honey-dew, and the mould are the more frequent forms the mischief takes. Some of these no possible precautions can prevent. The mould is often the result of too much manuring, or, in other words, too rich a soil, and is always aggravated, if not occasioned, by too much wet. Various remedies are adopted to check the evil, such as syringing or washing with tobacco-juice, or some similar preparation. Stripping the leaves from the bine for three feet from the ground, called "setting them on their legs," is an old method, and often succeeds when followed with dry, warm weather, as it lets in the sun and air to the roots. This points to, perhaps, the most potent remedy—which, however, is not under human control—which is some days of hot sunshine and gentle breezes. To let in the light and air and sunshine on many things would result in great improvement.

As the foliage in vegetation serves much the same purpose as do lungs in animals, the leaves constituting the breathing apparatus, it will be seen that anything preying on the young shoots, and embryo leaves, as in the case of the fly and louse, must be mischievous; as also when the developed leaves are choked, and rendered impervious to the air, as in the case of honey-dew. A heavy rain, especially if accompanied with thunder and lightning, will sometimes do good, by washing off the honey-dew, and killing the insects; but it must be very heavy to do much good; and oftener than not the remedy is worse than the disease, as the wind and rain knock the hops about, and if the fruit is much developed, bruise and discolour the hop. The lady-bird does its work more quietly, and much more effectually, and injures nothing. The hot sun, too, often does good, unless the soil be poor, and dry, and

shallow, for then the hops, both leaf and fruit, will burn, and then the hope of fruit is vain.

All one can do is not much; when he has got his ground in "good heart," and clean, when he has used his nidget freely and protected his garden from high winds, he can do little more than watch and wait. Having respect to all the difficulties, losses, dangers, and every other contingency, the careful, steady farmer will find that, taking the average of seven years, hops pay to grow. But if a man has not capital to enable him to stand a blight for one or two years, or even three, he runs great risk of coming to grief, and he had better not venture. I have seen men, coming into a hop district from a part of the country where hops are not grown, make shipwreck of their capital in a very short time. The "inventory" on a hop farm always runs into a good deal of money, owing to the expense of poles and other necessary gear.

But now it is close upon the first of September here, and my friend's farm at Little Biggenden, always in good tilth, presents a very hopeful aspect, so far as hops are concerned. He is a maltster as well as a farmer, as his father was before him; but malting time has long been over, and, as the malt-kilns serve very well as hop-kilns, the oast-house is being thoroughly cleaned and prepared. The waggons have fetched the Welsh coal from the station; the general dealer, or, maybe, the corn merchant, has sent in the casks of brimstone; the hop-pockets are being marked with the name of the grower; the odd man is repairing the hop-bins; and baskets, tally-tickets, and especially a new book, are all in readiness.

There are forty acres to be picked, and there will be about twelve "sets" of pickers—about a dozen or twenty to a set. The oast-room and kilns will not allow of more strength than that.

The names of the pickers are being entered day by day and hour by hour. My friend does not employ many "furreners" (foreigners)—that is, people who come down for the hopping from London or elsewhere. But, first of all, come the workmen's wives and families, and commonly they have both; and "the hopping" is the great resource to provide funds to pay rent, clear off the doctor's bill, square up with the grocer and the shoemaker, and furnish some ready money for winter clothing. All the family goes hopping;

even a little three-year-old can pick a few, or else tend the baby, who comes to look on, and occasionally add a little music to the charms of the scene. He lies there, under that tree or hedge, with the additional shelter of some antiquated "gingham."

Next to the workmen's families come the shoemaker—whose trade, however, is that of making boots—and his family, the blacksmith, the wheelwright, the carpenter, mayhap, or, at least, his family. All who are not above work, or, being ill, are below it, turn out into the hop-garden. The village artisans do a bit now and then, when they have nothing better to do. I knew a family who one year earned twenty pounds during the season, which was exceptionally long.

If, after the above arrangements, there are any bins to supply, there are certain more respectable "furreners," who have picked on that farm seven, ten, or more years, and who have written to say they would like to come again. For these a barn-end, or some other place even less aristocratic, is allotted, with plenty of straw, and free access to a wood-stack, that the cookery and washing may be done by a fire lighted in a safe place.

In this way all the bins are furnished, and all the "sets" made up. They can trust "Master," so they leave the "tally" to him; that is, the question of whether it shall be four, six, eight or more bushels per shilling. As the hops are good, they will have to pick seven or eight bushels for that sum; but the bushel is neither "pressed down" nor "running over," but taken as lightly—"hover" is the word—as it can be.

The bin—baskets are used in East Kent, and in some other places—is a rough frame-work of poles, six feet by about two and a half, with the ends having poles placed X-wise, so that a long pole may be placed at the top, on which the poles of hops are laid to be picked into the coarse bag which runs the length and width of the bin, and reaches to the ground. To every set or two there is a man, paid by the master, who is armed with two instruments—a sharp hook with a long handle, and a "hop-dog." With the one he cuts the bines near the bottoms, and with the other he "prizes" the poles out of the ground.

The "hop-dog" never barks, but he is very useful, and does a great deal of work. It is a crooked iron instrument, with

notches or teeth on the inside. The man takes it by its long handle, using it as a lever, and the pole is lifted easily and instantly. As the poles are lifted, all the bins of his set or sets are supplied, so that there is no delay. Twice a day the measurer comes round and empties the bins into "pokes," to be conveyed to the oast-house, and placed on the kilns to dry. By the measurer's side stands the man with the tally-book, entering the quantities opposite the names. The pickers draw on account if they wish it; but the "home dwellers" generally wait for a settlement until hopping is over.

Welsh coal is, in all cases, used for drying, as any other sort of coal would yield too much smoke. Brimstone is used to intensify and clear the fire; but it should be used sparingly, especially for the higher classes of hops, and, indeed, any fitted for pale ale brewing. More brimstone would tend to brighten the sample; but factors, merchants, and brewers' buyers would reject all such, as certain to flavour the beer.

It used to be the common plan for the pickers to work up to Saturday night, which necessitated the drier working all day, or nearly so, on Sunday. Now, however, the pickers are glad to leave off at twelve or one o'clock on Saturdays, and go home and wash, and bake, and clear up. By this method the drier gets to bed on Sunday morning; otherwise, he goes on without actual bed from the beginning to the end of the season, having a kind of shake-down in some odd corner of the oast-house.

Hops require about twelve hours on the kiln, and then to be spread on the floor of the oast to cool. They are then "pocketed." Pockets are long hessian bags, with the corners tied, into which the hops are crammed, pressed, squeezed, and jammed, which you like, or altogether.

The plan was, for a man to tread them in. As the pockets are eight or ten feet deep, it was warm work this treading, as, until he got his head above the top, he could have but little air. Treading is done with now; a machine does the work quicker, cheaper, and better.

A pocket of hops usually weighs a few pounds more than one hundredweight and a quarter. The weighing part of the hop is the seed and the yellow dust that clings to it, called "gold dust." It is in this the virtue chiefly resides.

All the farmers cannot furnish their bins

with "home-dwellers," so they are bound to have "furreners"; and they can be obtained to any number you want. The people who travel the country in "house carts" generally have an appointment for the hopping; but I do not remember to have seen a large number of the gipsy tribe. Thousands go down into the country from the lanes and alleys of London; and I can't conceive of anything better for them than three weeks, a month or more, down in the hop country, where they can earn fairly good wages, and get a healthy change.

When a farmer has more than one farm, the pickers are commonly conveyed in a waggon to and from their work. A terrible catastrophe occurred in the hopping season of 1853. A farmer residing at Tudeley, near Tonbridge, had also a farm in the parish of Hadlow, on the opposite side of the River Medway. Returning one evening, after their day's work, from the Hadlow farm to Tudeley, where their "apartments" were situated, the horses of the waggon took fright on crossing a high wooden bridge over the river. The bridge was not much used, and certainly was not safe. The crown of the bridge would be twenty feet from the water, and it was protected on the sides by an open railing only. Sad to say, the waggon was driven against the side of the bridge, which gave way, and waggon, horses, and people were precipitated into the water. Thirty were drowned. I have their names and ages; and any one can see their monument in the graveyard of Hadlow parish church, where they were all interred together. They were all strangers, or "furreners," and were mostly descendants of an old woman, who resided at Tring, Herts. I have her photograph, taken when she was one hundred and seven years old. Her name—at least, that by which she was commonly known—was Betty Leatherham, or Letheram. I knew her twenty-five years ago, but she has been dead many years.

The sleeping accommodation prepared for these visitors to country scenes is none of the best. Of course, there are exceptional cases; but want of room is a serious item. Nevertheless there should be care taken, more care, and, perhaps, inspection exercised. Some farmers have huts or hovels built for the purpose; but barns or bullock-houses would be preferable, with plenty of straw and no rats.

Before the railways which run through the hop districts began to run cheap trains, the inhabitants of hopping districts were often exposed to great annoyances. Besides very heavy poor rates, consequent on a large number of labourers settling in the parish, there would be a constant stream of people calling to sell or beg, during the week or two before hopping began. The pickers from London would tramp down, or drive a donkey with a cart, or a costermonger's barrow. Having no resources, and very little to sell, it meant giving to these frequent callers, most of whom were "hard-up." Now, since the railways have conferred the boon on the hoppers of a very cheap transit direct to their work, the public have been relieved of this nuisance.

The hoppers are not forgotten on Sunday. Not many of them are accustomed to go either to church or chapel; but it is a common thing, especially in some districts, for the ministers from both to conduct services out-of-doors, and sometimes men and women are employed; but more do the work voluntarily, to read and preach, or conduct a Sunday-school for the children.

The writer has done this again and again, and, avoiding controversy, has gone and addressed them on some of many themes which the Gospel narratives furnish. No one who understands his work need fear either interruption or incivility. Don't pitchfork the words into them; but, remembering they are members of the one great family of the one Creator, treat them as such.

A good deal is done in some districts now in connection with free teas and lectures on interesting subjects, and by distributing gifts of clothing. I have had as hearty a shake of the hand from some of these people as ever I had from anybody; and I have had the young among them—big boys and girls—hang about me as if I had been an old friend.

But things have changed, as to hopping, since I first knew about it. The duty has been taken off, and the trade is thrown open to the world; and, in consequence, very high prices are not gained now.

A favourite home of the hop is Bavaria; and Bavarian hops are well known in England now, as also are American. The Bavarians have improved upon their old methods of drying. Formerly, they knew nothing about kilns and oasts.

About thirty-five years ago, a friend of mine bought some hop-growing land in Bavaria. He was a merchant—that is, one who buys of the grower and sells to the brewer; as distinct from a "factor," who sells for the grower, and does not hold as his own. He had some fine samples of Bavarian hops in his warehouse; but the drying was defective, and the large brewers would not have them. Being an enterprising man, he had oast-houses and kilns erected on his Bavarian farm or farms, on the English principle, and sent Englishmen over to manage the drying and packing. The speculation paid; and the Bavarian hops, dried as in England, sold well. There was a demand for them in London, and, of course, that created a demand in Bavaria. Not only my friend's own growth, but that of others, came into his hands; and I remember with what gusto he told me of sights he saw—women bringing their hop-beds and hop-pillows for the English gentlemen to buy.

Of course, hops can be grown in Bavaria and other parts of Germany at a much cheaper rate than in England; and it is only the best English samples that will excel them in quality. Land is cheaper, labour is cheaper, and the habits of the people, farmers and others, are such that they can, and do, make money go further than we do.

Some of the Kentish hop-growers, in the Weald at least, have passed into very changed circumstances. There are very few of them wealthy now; and very many of those who have escaped bankruptcy, are very poor. They did the wisest thing who retired before the hard times came on. The hop-grower in the Weald is shut up very much to hops and corn and cattle. The land in many parts will not bear sheep in the winter, and cattle must be, for the more part, stall-fed, which is dearer than a pasture of grass.

Three or four years since, I visited a lady who owns several small farms in the Weald. She told me she had been compelled to reduce the rents, and even then she could not always get them, as the farmers could not pay. She assured me that her agent had reported to her that the tenant of a certain farm could not pay his rent, and his time was up to leave; but he recommended that the tenant should be allowed to remain without paying rent, as no one would take the farm, and if tenantless it would be ruined. When I knew her in her husband's time, she said,

"If that farm had been to let, I should have six or eight applications before dinner."

The great drawback in connection with many of these Weald farms is, that if the hops fail, all fails, for the corn will not yield a return, or, at least, a profit; and fruit-growing, away from London, or other large markets, does not pay, especially when the land is not well suited to the cultivation of fruit.

I have sometimes seen, chiefly in Mid and East Kent, hops and fruit grown in the same garden or orchard. There are these advantages about it: that when one thing fails, another may not; and the high culture which hops require will, if the trees are well looked after and properly pruned, develop the early fruit-bearing of the trees. But, then, some of the farms are held on short terms of tenancy, and it will not pay the tenant to invest money for which he may never see a return, or, worse, have his rent raised in proportion to the added value he has given to the land. Landlords, at least, should find trees, and make terms with the tenant for their proper culture.

Hop-growers have to suffer, moreover, from the dishonesty of some brewers, and, probably, maltsters suffer also; for, as some are clever enough to brew stuff they call beer without hops, so others, and perhaps the same, concoct a mixture resembling that beverage which is quite innocent of malt.

That we are not bearing false witness may be plainly seen by an announcement in the "County Council Gazette," of the ninth of June, 1890, under "Herefordshire:

"Captain Mynors moved: That the Council request Her Majesty's Government, through the Minister of Agriculture, to enforce or amend the provisions of the Merchandise Marks Act, 1887, so as to provide that all liquors now described and sold as 'beer,' and made of materials other than malt and hops, be plainly described as such."

Hop-growing is a needful and important branch of agriculture; and, though it no longer yields a revenue to the Government, it provides, in various ways, healthy and remunerative employment for a large number of a class of people who can ill afford to lose such a source of income.

Let us still hope that the hop industry will improve; and if the growers never

again become the magnates they have been, that they will find that and all the other branches of their important enterprise succeed to the extent of their moderate wishes.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

A STORY IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer term was passing quickly over, and Janet Jerome had slid with wondrous ease into Sefton grooves. She was a favourite with every one; but neither the flattering attentions of the young unmarried masters, nor, what she valued infinitely more, her intimate relations with a more inveterate bachelor, her cousin, had as yet turned her head. It was a head quite as liable to be turned as that of any other little girl of seventeen fresh from the country; but it was not turned as yet. And Janet was become entirely at home. The daily dinner with the boys was no longer an ordeal to her, though it was to the Dodo—with whom blood flowed to the cheeks as readily as dactyls and spondee flowed from his pen—and, if the Sixth Form table was still constrained and stupid, there was always the long table to watch; there was always the broad back and black head of one well-built youth—who sat with his back to the Sixth Form table, among boys much younger and smaller than himself—there was always this boy's wrong side to weave romances about. Janet was capable of a good deal of calm romancing; but this was only one of a set of possibilities in Janet's character which were impossibilities in George Saniter's imperfect reading of it.

Mr. Saniter made it quite a practice now to recount to Janet the more heinous errors of the young Philistines of the Lower Fifth. Strange to say, though he had never before seen any fun in this kind of blunders, he laughed at them heartily now with Janet; and he was even known to make merry over them in form, where his continuous good temper was a working miracle during the whole of that summer term.

One day he showed Janet a Latin prose which the scores and corrections of his own red pencil had rendered well-nigh illegible.

"What is one to do with such an atrocious fellow as this?" he asked her. "Just count the false concords."

Janet saw Newcomen's name in the top right-hand corner, and answered promptly: "Let him off! Give him up as a bad job. I am sure he is one!"

"I'm not sure that wouldn't be the wisest thing to do," the master laughed; "but it would be extreme; and in the case of this particular fellow——"

He stopped. He did not talk to Janet about everything; he drew the line at impositions.

So the term went on, with tennis to play and cricket to watch; and sometimes a book in the garden or in the meadows for the sleepy afternoons; and sometimes—but more rarely—a walk with the master in the long, cool evenings. And Janet found it all very full of happiness, and charm, and lasting novelty.

And so it came to July, and, on the first Monday of the month, to Founder's Day, and the Old Boys' match, and the annual gathering of Old Seftonians. Then did the 'Varsities forward consignments of Seftonians who had only left a year or so, dressed very fashionably and smelling of tobacco; and the Temple came down handsomely with Seftonian barristers, briefless but argumentative; and the Stock Exchange let loose Seftonians who travelled with betting-books, and packs of cards, and had humorous designs upon the masters; and the Church preserved the equilibrium of the gathering by the addition of weighty Seftonian divines and Seftonian curates, who were as yet only heavy. And the whole lot met together, and supped, and sang the school songs, and drank the school toasts, and vowed solemnly that the best days of all their lives had been their schooldays, and clean forgot, to a man, the fagging, and the flogging, and the bullying, and the verbs in *μ*. And, during all this stirring time, poor little Miss Janet—who would have enjoyed it to the hilt, if anybody did—was confined to the house, and even to a darkened room. For the great heat had overpowered her; on the Sunday morning she had nearly fainted in chapel, and to-day—well, she was up, but that was all.

In the morning she felt too ill to do anything but sleep; but, as the day wore on, her head grew better; and in the afternoon she was well enough to be oppressed rather than relieved by the intense stillness of the house.

The whole house, and, indeed, the whole school, were watching the Old Boys' match. Janet fidgeted; she was too well now to sleep any more. She tried to read; but for that she was not yet quite well enough. Her mind was idle, but discontented, and sufficiently alert—singularly favourable conditions for the visitation of anything in the way of temptation. And temptation quickly coming, good, wise little Janet—Mr. Saniter's flawless ideal—had not even the grace to fall—she jumped!

She had yearned so often, and so wistfully, to explore the boys' part of the house—to peep into the studies with the sweet, little flower-boxes and the ivy-covered windows. She knew so well the green-baize door upstairs that communicated with the study passages—knew every brass-headed nail in it, for she had watched it many a time, wishing that she only dared—— But this time there was so very little daring required. The boys, every one of them, were at the match. There was no fear of them. And then Cousin George, and even Cousin Pauline, were there, too. Never was there a more alluring temptation; never was the risk of discovery less. The dear little girl did not dally with the tempter five minutes. Five! She was in her first study while the first minute was still ticking.

And Janet was sadly disappointed with the first study, and with the next, and the next after that; and, in fact, with the first half-dozen or so. The size was really too absurd, to begin with; the area of these so-called studies was smaller than that of an ordinary old four-poster. Then it seemed to Janet that they had all the same uncomfortable folding-chairs, and stupid, little tables, and cheap, china candlesticks; the same awful photographs of the mother and the sisters, in the same tawdry, plush frames; the same florid prints of the chase, in pairs; the same seedy canaries in the same gaudy cages. Even the contents of the flower-boxes were rank and flaring—the best of them—when seen from within.

Janet was disheartened and disgusted; her illusion was gone. She only inspected two of the studies; the rest got the merest contemptuous peep. And thus it happened that Janet was taken completely by surprise, and her peep became a round-eyed gaze, on coming to the best study at Sefton. When she had sufficiently recovered herself, she stepped boldly in—into

an enchanted chamber that surpassed her dreams even more than the others had fallen short of them.

In size, of course, it was the same; but in nothing else. Here there was no silly little table, but a handsome *escritoire*; and the candlesticks were silver. Nor did the arm-chair fold up, and cost twelve-and-sixpence—it took up half the area of the study, and was of the kind we loll in at the clubs. There were only one or two pictures—good engravings, well framed. There were few trifles, no trumperies. Everything was good, and in good taste. The flowers in the box were particularly nice, and plain, consisting principally of *Marguerite* daisies. Janet could scarcely credit it that this was one of the boys' studies; she felt, rather, that it was the den of a full-grown Sybarite.

And the studies slept in silence; not a boy was about. Miss Janet peeped through the window; the quad was empty, and at peace. Yet the boys' entrance to the house was from the quad—if one came, she would hear him—a foot on the stairs, and the green door would swing again between Janet and the forbidden precincts. She was safe. She sat down at the *escritoire* and closed her eyes, and tried to imagine herself the legitimate occupant of this luxurious study. And would she get on well with the other fellows? Would she detest old Saniter—Cousin George—very heartily? Would she take half the interest in Virgil, and Livy, and Thucydides, as a boy, that she took in them as a girl?

She made a pleasant picture, sitting there with her eyes tightly shut. The sun streamed in upon her through the open window; and had you watched her from the threshold you would have seen her neat little profile in sharpest silhouette, and the bright rays bursting through her fair hair; hair which had not been very tidily arranged that day, so that the sunshine had a really magical effect in among the tangled threads and tresses—you would have thought them golden, though they were only a light brown. A pleasant picture enough; but one that would have made somebody else's hair stand upon end!

But she did not waste many of the precious moments with her eyes shut; she opened them, and looked about her; and it was then that they first fell upon some Latin verses in process of manufacture, being scrawled in an indolent hand upon slovenly scraps of paper.

There were many erasures, and a few attempts at improvement; but Janet deciphered those lines that seemed intended to stand. She read them without qualms; could there be anything private about a boy's Latin verses? Well, it is true that they might have been the Dodo's addresses to Corinna; but, luckily, they were not; and to mention them in the same breath is insulting to the Dodo. For these verses were as bad as they possibly could be. A great big false quantity in the very first line set the little scholar's teeth on edge; and the line had no *cæsura*. In the second line a complete disregard of the stringent laws that govern the latter half of the pentameter was nothing less than shocking; Janet felt for her Cousin George as she had never felt for him before. But these were mere superficial defects of metre. There were worse things yet. The lines construed no better than they scanned. Little Miss Jerome squirmed in her chair. Then she thought she would like just to mend the verses, and then fly away, and make this poor incorrigible youth believe in angels and their visits for the rest of his natural life. But she found the verses too bad to mend. The English was before her, in a poetry book with the leaf turned down; *Gradus* and dictionaries were at her elbow; and—was there really any harm in it at all?

She wrote down the first hexameter with lightning speed, and was haggling over the last feet of the pentameter—the crux of the couplet—when it suddenly occurred to Miss Janet that she might as well know who it was she was working for. She turned to the fly-leaf of the *Gradus*; it bore the name of a boy she did not know even by sight, and a scurrilous caricature of him by another hand. She tried the Latin-English dictionary; but in this case it was quite a different name, written over and over again, and some lines of doggerel. The English-Latin belonged to some one else. A fourth book, taken at random from the shelf, was the property of a fourth boy. Then Janet shook her head, and ticketed the unknown Sybarite with lax principles—but went on with his verses merrily.

It is amazing how the time flies when you are making Latin verses. You twist and turn, and fit together and take to pieces again, and scour the *Gradus* up and down. It is absorbing work, if you have the knack of it in any kind of degree. Janet had a very considerable knack—

composition had been her father's strongest point—and she never dreamt how the minutes were whizzing by until she had begun the last couplet, when the door was pushed gently open, and she started back in her chair—to see Mr. Newcomen standing on the threshold.

In calculating so certainly upon the ease and simplicity of her escape, Janet had quite forgotten that the boys frequently went about in tennis-shoes, and that the tennis-shoe imparts a silent, cat-like tread.

"Don't get up," said Newcomen, civilly; "stop and finish his verses."

"Oh, but I must get up! I must go! This is dreadful! I never thought——"

Janet laughed, nervously; but she felt ready to cry; and her cheeks were flaming.

"Not a bit of it," said Newcomen. "Look here, nobody's about. I'm only here because I'm kept in over those—that is, because I'm kept in. I've just come from 'call-over' on the ground, or I should have been here the whole afternoon. But nobody else will be here for hours."

"Then I must certainly go," said Janet, with a sudden access of dignity—and also of self-possession.

"No!" Newcomen blocked the doorway, but not too resolutely. "Do listen to reason, Miss Jerome, and stay and finish this poor fellow's verses, now you are about them. Because—look here! I can run away and sit in the quad, and whistle, don't you know, if any one comes!"

But there was not much anxiety in the young man's tones; nor did he show the least readiness to put his proposal into action.

"Who is the poor fellow?" Janet asked.

"Oh, a terrible chap; a disgrace to the house; and a hopeless case as to his Latin verses. He is always in hot water about his verses, Miss Jerome. It would be a real kindness to stop and finish this set for him, now you have begun. He would be grateful to you for ever; I can answer for him in that, as though it were myself."

"This is his study, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't like it a bit! It's far too extravagant and luxurious for a boy. Besides," severely, "I hate boys who steal other boys' books; and all these books have different names in them."

"Quite right, Miss Jerome. But extravagance and luxury, and a mean capacity for making Latin verses, and a large capacity for petty larceny in books, are his besetting sins."

"He is a friend of yours, then?"

"My greatest friend."

Janet turned over the leaves of the *Gradus* rather nervously, and with no object.

"You mean to finish his verses, then?" Newcomen cried, delightedly.

Janet turned upon him.

"Do you mean to do what you said you would do?"

"Keep watch in the quad? Very well; since you insist."

And Newcomen went away, sighing; and Janet was vexed that she had got rid of him so easily.

Now, of course, was her chance of escape. It was her plain duty to cut and run. Yet that would mean keeping poor Mr. Newcomen on guard in the quad all for nothing, and perhaps for hours; it would mean making a fool of him, in fact. To Mr. Newcomen, therefore, it was her plain duty to stop and finish the verses.

But "the numbers came" no longer as they had come before; her brain would not bite; her breast was in a flutter, and her fingers tore the leaves of the *Gradus*, but never pointed to the right word. While Newcomen stood in the doorway, his dark, roving eyes had rested longer upon her eyes than they were wont to rest anywhere. Janet felt at once frightened and emboldened. She could not finish the verses; she would not run away. A bright thought struck her. Mr. Newcomen should come and finish them himself for his friend.

She went to the window; he was watching it from the quad. She called him, timidly; he was with her the next instant. For downright, determined coquetry, these innocent little girls from the country are bad to beat; during that instant Janet plucked a handful of Mr. Newcomen's *Marguerite* daisies, and fastened them dexterously in her dress.

"But I can't!" said Newcomen, when Janet explained what she wanted with him. "I can't indeed! I am every bit as big a dunce as this other fellow. As for verses, I couldn't write one in plain English—let alone Latin. We must give it up, I suppose; the poor chap will have to do the last couplet himself, since the Dodo has grown too pious to help him any more."

"Who is 'the poor chap'?" demanded Janet, calmly, rising slowly and confronting him.

He hesitated. "Why—I'd have told you his name if you'd asked me at first,

Miss Jerome; but—the fact is, we've abused him so, between us, that I should hardly like to tell you now," said Newcomen—whose wit was not unready.

Janet looked him through and through. There seemed to be indignation in her blue eyes; but his back was to the light, he could not tell; nor did he care very much if there was.

"I think I understand," she said at last—as though she had not understood, more or less, from the first!—"let me pass."

"No, but really, Miss Jerome——"

"Let me pass this moment!"

"But any way the dunce must thank you——"

"Do you hear? This moment!"

That moment there was a slight scuffle—the next, the green door swung—Janet was gone. And Newcomen was left standing in his study, his face tingling with the sharpest, smartest slap it had ever received.

That was for kissing her.

Of the kiss, the less said the better; but the slap had wide and far-reaching consequences. Never in his life before had Mr. Newcomen been taken so completely by surprise; never had he admired anything half so much as Janet's face and gesture in the moment of his well-merited punishment; never had he known what self-contempt was until now, when he stood, and smarted, and heard the green door swing to.

While he still stood, the green door swung again. But there were no more footsteps; only a number of Marguerite

daisies lay about in the dust at the end of the passage.

The scene was not one about which either actor in it was at all likely to talk; nevertheless, Janet was on the brink of confession a day or two later, when the master showed her what he described as one of the most impudent copies of verses he had ever looked over. Janet changed colour as she read them.

"What I should like to find out," said the master, "is, who it was that did the first three couplets for him. They are excellent. There is no boy in my house who could have done them, excepting Hanson; and Hanson promised me some time ago never to do another boy's composition again; and Hanson is a boy incapable of breaking his promise. But the last couplet, which is execrable, is this boy's usual form."

Hanson was the Dodo.

"Does he say he did them himself?" Janet asked.

"He does."

"But he did not!"

Her emphasis struck Mr. Saniter as rather strong for mere influence or suspicion.

"Of course he did not. What can one do with such a fellow, Janet?"

Janet stamped her foot.

"Expel him!"

"Why, Janet," said the master, "do you know that this is the very fellow you wanted me to let off altogether the other day? You are flying to the other extreme now!"

She did know it. But, the other day, Newcomen had not kissed her.

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